

This Week In Congress

July 19, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

House Agriculture Committee Reviews BSE Testing Process

On Wednesday, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman testified before a joint hearing of the House Agriculture and Government Reform Committees. Her testimony was one of many about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) process of testing for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).

During the hearing, I had the opportunity to ask the Secretary if the USDA is evaluating the different types of rapid tests for BSE. I urged the USDA to analyze testing processes to minimize the number of false positives. In recent weeks, two inconclusive tests have led to significant drops in beef prices. While the markets have recovered quickly, the damage done is troubling.

Since the first case of BSE was discovered last December, USDA has been attempting to get a new testing process in place. In her testimony before the Committee, Veneman said that the USDA will continue working with federal, state and local agencies, as well as with producers, to see that testing procedures are in the best interest for all involved. That is reassuring. Although the process has not been without controversy, I am confident that the U.S. food supply is safe and that consumer confidence in beef remains strong.

I have and will continue to meet with Kansas livestock producers to discuss how USDA regulations, animal identification and beef exports affect their operations. As Congress continues oversight on the USDA's expanded surveillance plan, I will work to ensure that any new regulations or testing procedures are based on common sense and sound science and do not impose a costly burden on our producers.

House Passes Agriculture Funding Legislation for 2005

This week, the House passed the 2005 funding legislation for the Department of Agriculture, which includes the budget for farm programs, rural development and nutrition programs, such as the school lunch program and food stamps. This appropriations bill is one of the thirteen measures annually considered by Congress that deal with the funding of the federal government. To date, the House has passed eight of the thirteen measures.

The funding for the Department of Agriculture includes important funding to help ensure the health and safety of our food supply. A \$20 million increase in funding was provided for BSE detection and prevention.

Included in the legislation for Kansas are funds for the Cheney Lake Watershed, part of which is in Reno County, to producers in the area whose Conservation Reserve Program land was removed from the conservation priority area. In addition, the legislation includes research funding for the Sorghum Crop Improvement Center, the Wheat Genetics Resource Center and the Animal Science Food Safety Consortium which is a partnership including Kansas State University.

What many people don't realize is that much of the Department of Agriculture's budget goes to non-farm expenditures. Domestic food programs such as food stamps and child nutrition comprise 60 percent of the department's annual budget.□

House Passes Australia Free Trade Agreement

This week, the House also passed the U.S.- Australian Free Trade Agreement by a vote of 314 to 109. The legislation implements a trade agreement that would reduce tariffs and trade barriers between the U.S. and Australia.

While this agreement presents good opportunities for U.S. manufacturers, many farm groups were opposed as they felt the agriculture provisions did not go far enough. Elimination of the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) was a priority for Kansas wheat farmers. It is very important that monopolies such as the AWB be eliminated in the World Trade Organization (WTO) agenda. I will continue to support policies that eliminate unfair trading practices during the WTO negotiations. Kansas producers should have the opportunity to compete in a fair market.

Meeting with Kansas Agriculture Groups

Agriculture was also a theme in the office this week, as several Kansas ag groups were in Washington, D.C. Kenlon Johannes and Dennis Hupe of Topeka, along with Harold Kraus of Hays, were in representing the Kansas Soybean Association. We discussed the latest on energy legislation being considered in Congress and other provisions concerning biodiesel. Kansas Farm Bureau President, Steve Baccus, was in the office this week to discuss energy issues, as well as the agriculture appropriations being considered by the House.

Also in this week was the Kansas Corn Growers Association (KCGA). Ken McCauley of White Cloud, a Kansas Corn Commissioner and member of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) board, along with Brian Baalman of Menlo, President of the KCGA, were in to discuss the need for a Renewable Fuels Standard and a small producer tax credit in the energy bill. They also discussed the need for crop insurance, especially as it relates to multi-year disasters. Also in with the group were Dan Guetterman of Bucyrus, a Kansas Corn Commissioner; Bob Timmons of Fredonia, a KCGA board member and Kansas Corn Commissioner; Charles Foltz of Garnett and KCGA board member; and Jere White of Garnett, the Executive Director of the KCGA.

Celebrating 125 Years of Downs

On Saturday, I joined Downs-area residents for their 125th anniversary and had the chance to walk in the community parade. I always enjoy being in Downs and meeting with area residents. In 125 years, Downs has built a rich history, and continues to be a progressive community. The town has good leadership and a strong sense of community pride that helps them maintain their livelihood.

Congressional Internship Featured in Washington Post

In Tuesday's Washington Post, I was interviewed for a story about my time as an intern in Washington, D.C. I was an intern with Kansas Congressman Keith Sebelius during the summer of 1974, when Congress held hearings on the Impeachment of President Richard Nixon.

The full story can be found at:

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45234-2004Jul12.html

In the Office

Representatives of the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce were in the office this week. Bob Krause, Sue Peterson and Dick Hayter with Kansas State University were in, as were Kent Glasscock, John Armbrust, Dick Carter and Linda Weis to talk about transportation issues and how they affect the Manhattan community. We also discussed the future of Kansas military installations in the upcoming Base Realignment and Closure Commission process.

Many other Kansans were in Washington, D.C. on vacation and came by for a tour of the

Capitol building. Helen Anschutz and her sister, Stella Nesbitt, both of Russell were in, as were Randy and Cindy Linner of Norton, with their children Brady and McKenzie. Also in were Jill Merkel and Kelly Merkel of Robinson and Mark Perrier of Eureka.

Mark and Deb Farr of Hutchinson were in, as was Jose Davis of Topeka. Also in from Topeka were Dan and Mary Tritsch and their children, Maddie, Morgan and Jacob. Jon and Terri Snapp were in with their daughter Alex. Their other daughter, Morgan, is a Congressional intern in my office this summer.

Lora Marietta of Oberlin was in along with Richard and Delayne May and their children, Danica and Nolan, also of Oberlin. Don and Melody Crowder and their sons Trevor and Collin of Salina visited, as did Kevin and Frances Mitchelson of Pittsburg, with their son William. In addition, long-time teacher and friend, Rick Reed was in with a large group of students from Bennington High School.

Very truly yours,

Jerry